



Navy trims troop strength, offering early EAS

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Regional soccer tourney begins with Yuma win over 29 Palms

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Friday: Sunny High: 72 Low: 47
Saturday: Partly cloudy High: 69 Low: 46
Sunday: Sunny High: 72 Low: 46

Serving Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona

DESERT

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Forward...March!



Photo by Sgt. Terika S. King

Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron Marines participated in a 3-mile motivation hike Monday afternoon. Squadron commanding officer, Lt. Col. Robert B. Ford said the hike’s purpose was to build camaraderie and increase the physical fitness, endurance and combat readiness of squadron personnel. The squadron completed a course that began at the parade deck, looped around to the physical fitness test course, and made its way back to the parade deck where dinner was provided.

Show me the money: Yuma Marines get BAH increase

Cpl. Laura A. Mapes
Desert Warrior Staff

The 2009 Basic Housing Allowance rates were released by the Department of Defense Dec. 15, 2008.

The average housing allowance across the military increased approximately 6.9 percent Jan. 1. However, the BAH rates for Yuma jumped an average of 9.9 percent.

According to Mark Smith, the station housing manager, the most significant increase for Yuma’s service members is prior enlisted officers and junior grade officers with dependents, whose BAH rates increased by more than 17 percent or about \$200.

Enlisted service members have also seen large improvements; an E-8 with dependents received an increase of \$208 per month.

Junior enlisted ranks, E-1 to E-4 with

dependents, saw a 16.9 percent increase, significantly above the national average. Officer ranks, O-5 and O-6 with dependents, are under the average with an increase of 6.1 percent.

The increase to service members paychecks should not result in a sharp increase in prices by local landlords, said Smith.

Inflation has more of an effect on Yuma apartments than military (BAH) rates do, said Smith, who has been the housing manager for 18 years.

“The system to determine BAH rates is very complicated and usually lags about three years behind the true increases to cost-of-living,” said Smith. “It’s safe to say the increases now are making up for cost-of-living increases in 2005-2006 rather than increases in 2008.”

The increase in BAH should hit Marines paychecks starting Jan. 15, said Lance Cpl. Oscar Loya, Installation Personnel Administration Center clerk.

2009 Basic Allowance for Housing Rates for Yuma

	E1-E4	E-5	E-6	E-7	E-8	E-9
2008 WITHOUT DEPENDENTS	\$646	\$731	\$835	\$869	\$1,002	\$1,045
2009 WITHOUT DEPENDENTS	\$755	\$842	\$971	\$1,008	\$1,151	\$1,206
2008 WITH DEPENDENTS	\$861	\$974	\$1,113	\$1,145	\$1,181	\$1,244
2009 WITH DEPENDENTS	\$1,001	\$1,116	\$1,294	\$1,339	\$1,389	\$1,440

	W-1	W-2	W-3	W-4	W-5
2008 WITHOUT DEPENDENTS	\$836	\$1,001	\$1,049	\$1,121	\$1,153
2009 WITHOUT DEPENDENTS	\$971	\$1,150	\$1,212	\$1,305	\$1,350
2008 WITH DEPENDENTS	\$1,114	\$1,160	\$1,203	\$1,260	\$1,325
2009 WITH DEPENDENTS	\$1,295	\$1,359	\$1,420	\$1,448	\$1,481

	O-1	O-2	O-3	O-4	O-5	O-6
2008 WITHOUT DEPENDENTS	\$748	\$935	\$1,063	\$1,149	\$1,170	\$1,203
2009 WITHOUT DEPENDENTS	\$885	\$1,076	\$1,230	\$1,344	\$1,374	\$1,420
2008 WITH DEPENDENTS	\$990	\$1,110	\$1,201	\$1,353	\$1,459	\$1,471
2009 WITH DEPENDENTS	\$1,136	\$1,290	\$1,417	\$1,494	\$1,548	\$1,560

	O-1E	O-2E	O-3E
2008 WITHOUT DEPENDENTS	\$974	\$1,035	\$1,113
2009 WITHOUT DEPENDENTS	\$1,116	\$1,194	\$1,294
2008 WITH DEPENDENTS	\$1,152	\$1,197	\$1,270
2009 WITH DEPENDENTS	\$1,349	\$1,411	\$1,453

Marine pushes through flames to save 80-year-old Californian

Lance Cpl. Josue Aguirre
Desert Warrior Staff

A station Marine received the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal Dec. 31 for risking his life to save an elderly man.

Cpl. Vincent P. Saldaña, Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron 13 aviation ordnance systems technician, pulled an 80-year-old man from a burning house in Ontario, Calif. Aug. 8.

Saldaña was in Ontario on leave for a wedding. Hours before the wedding, he and a friend were passing the local high school when they noticed smoke.

The Ontario native drove to the back of the school, finding a house on fire in a nearby cul-de-sac. Bystanders then informed him someone was

still inside the house.

Saldaña described the heat as intense when he opened the front door.

“There was a whole bunch of smoke, my eyes were getting watery, my lungs were closing up and there was this heat,” said Saldaña. “It was completely black in there, I couldn’t see anything and even the ground was too hot.”

Despite the heat forcing bystanders to back away, Saldaña rushed in, knowing lives were at stake.

Upon entering, Saldaña found Willis Huxman dazed, injured and disoriented in the thick, black smoke that consumed the house.

Huxman was a neighbor and had been visiting when the fire started. He is also the grandfather to one of Saldaña’s closest friends.

Saldaña led Huxman outside to safety, instructing onlookers to get Huxman some water.

Once out of immediate danger, Huxman told

Saldaña that Dorothy Paulsen, the resident of the house, was still inside.

With total disregard for his own life, Saldaña entered the flaming structure again and searched as long as he could, but was unsuccessful, exiting the structure just before the front room flashed over with fire.

“My main mission was to get her out,” said Saldaña.

Determined to save the woman, it occurred to him that the garage entrance could provide access to the kitchen, which he was unable to reach during his search.

Using an axe, he began to chop away at the metal garage door.

Saldaña was squeezing through t1he hole he’d made, when police on the scene pulled him back, preventing any further rescue attempts for his own safety.

“When your adrenaline kicks in you don’t

care about yourself. You put yourself in danger for someone else you don’t even know. I didn’t know this lady, but we’re trained as Marines to do the right thing. We’re willing to risk our lives to save someone else’s because that’s someone else’s grandma, someone else’s mom. It’s just the right thing to do,” said Saldaña.

Paulsen did not survive. Reports indicated the fire was electrical and had started with a box fan plugged into the wall that divided the kitchen and living room.

Saldaña’s heroic efforts did not go unnoticed. Approximately four months later, his award ceremony took place.

“I felt honored and proud,” said Lt. Col. Guillermo G. Meza-Ortega, MALS-13 commanding officer. “His actions were above and beyond the call of duty and it provides an illustration of what the Marine Corps is and does.”

2008 Yuma air show commercial takes 1st in marketing competition

Lance Cpl. Gregory Aalto
Desert Warrior Staff

The 2008 Yuma air show television commercial won first place in the International Council of Air Show marketing competition Dec. 10 in Las Vegas.

The commercial, which competes in the large air show category, was made by Yuma’s Marine Corps Community Services and was done entirely with existing resources.

“The reason we won was because we involved our community the best,” said Roger Lopez, MCCS marketing director, referring to the Yuma youth and scenery involved in the commercial.

Air shows with 15,000 or less in attendance are classified as small shows, while those with more than 15,000 are placed in the large show category. Yuma’s air show typically averages 25,000 to 30,000

in attendance. This year’s air show is expected to draw more than 50,000 spectators. The ICAS Marketing Awards recognize outstanding achievement in event, product and service promotion by air shows, air show performers and air show support services.

The commercial features young children explaining aviation-related jobs they would like to do when they grow up, followed by a montage of air show footage.

“The commercial was done entirely in house. So basically, it cost nothing,” said Lopez.

Of the top three commercials, MCCS was the only one advertising a military air show. The other two were promoting civilian air shows with marketing budgets around \$5,000, said Lopez.

Lopez’s assistance and suggestions are now being sought by other professional air show committees because of the winning commercial’s quality and minimal budget, said Greg McShane, airfield operations officer, who helped in the commercial’s production.

The commercial can be viewed at www.yumaairshow.com.

Troops escape financial crisis, utilize support programs

Lisa Daniel
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – Soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are relatively insulated from the financial disasters affecting many Americans, and increasingly are taking advantage of programs designed to promote what military leaders call “financial readiness,” military financial counselors say.

All the services offer free financial counseling to service members on installations, and troops and their spouses are using the services more frequently, even while few are reporting mortgage foreclosures or spousal job losses that are increasing in the civilian sector.

The Navy provided financial counseling to 237,000 sailors and their spouses at 70 installations this year, increasing their outreach to sailors by 51 percent and their outreach to spouses by 100 percent, said Patricia Johnson, who oversees the Navy’s personal financial management programs.

“It’s not that they’re having more problems,” Johnson said. “But people are more concerned.” Only 4 percent of 1,300 sailors surveyed in May said they felt “in over their heads” with personal finances, she said.

Johnson credits the Navy financial programs with helping sailors feel confident. “We feel that our robust program that we have in the Navy ... and what our financial educators and [counselors] do in the field help these numbers stay down.”

Some Army installations are also seeing an increase in soldiers seeking financial help. Lynn Olavarria, manager of the financial readiness program at Fort Bragg, N.C., said her group sees about 400 soldiers and spouses per month.

“We’re getting a few more every year,” she said. “I think that’s more awareness.”

With a steady paycheck, good benefits and a lower rate of home ownership, troops enjoy some buffers to financial instability. “I think the services that are available to military

people make it a very desirable place during a recession, more so than in the private sector,” Johnson said.

Still, service members began experiencing the same price increases earlier this year — when gasoline spiked to more than \$4 per gallon — as everyone else.

“In the commissaries, there was an increase in prices just like in the private sector,” said Mike Hire, director of the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society on Camp Pendleton, Calif. “Things are cheaper overall [than on the economy], but they did get more expensive.”

Hire said he expected to see fewer people when gas prices dipped this fall to less than half of the price in early summer, but they’ve sought help in about the same numbers.

“A lot of our military members have been using credit cards to get by, and now they’re

“I think the services that are available to military people make it a very desirable place during a recession, more so than in the private sector.”

— Patricia Johnson,
Navy personal financial management

trying to get down some of that credit card debt, just like the general public,” he said. “That’s where we’re seeing that extra gas money going.”

The military and its support organizations have unveiled several programs in the past year and a half to promote personal financial stability with the understanding that financial hardships can pose a distraction to military missions. Some of the programs include:

- “Financial Readiness Challenge” events at installations around the country sponsored by the Defense Department’s military community and family policy office and scheduled through February;
- Dave Ramsey’s Financial Peace University, Military Edition, provided by chaplains at some Army installations;
- The Military Saves campaign to promote

financial savings among service members; and

- Quick-assistance loans from the service relief societies, which provide grants and no-interest loans.

Service officials say they are being proactive in offering services to combat problems specific to service members.

“The biggest thing we have with the economy is soldiers worried that their civilian landlords will go bust,” Army spokesman Paul Boyce said. Staff judge advocate offices on installations are working with soldiers to create the best rental contracts based on state laws, Boyce said.

“That’s been the No. 1 source of financial concern in the Army,” he said. “That’s what we’re hearing from [the] staff judge advocate legal assistance community.”

Another issue for service members is being the target of financial scams -- a problem that has gotten so bad that Arizona state Attorney General Terry Goddard recently created an advisory board to stop it.

Predatory lending also has been a problem, but seems to be decreasing through educational outreach to service members and passage of a federal law last year to curb it, officials said.

The Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society helped to disperse \$1.1 million to sailors after they sought high-interest commercial loans last year, said John Alexander, vice president and chief communications officer at the society’s headquarters. That amount was down to \$250,000 in the first three quarters of this year, he said.

Sailors and Marines were seeking the high-interest or “payday” loans because “it was just too easy,” Alexander said. The society had been sitting down with each service member and asking questions and providing counseling, he explained, and the commercial lenders “didn’t ask you anything.”

As an alternative to payday loans, the society started its “quick-assistance” loans of up to \$300 for which applicants do not have to see a financial counselor, Alexander said. The society’s requests for assistance are up 39 percent over last year because of the popularity of the quick-assistance loans, he said.

Street Talk

What is your New Year’s Resolution?



“I want to get in shape and become a better runner.”
—Lance Cpl. Shakeitha Guillen, MAWTS-1



“I want to save up at least \$10,000 before the end of this year.”
—Lance Cpl. Chris Harris, H&HS



“I get out in May, so I want to become a firefighter and get halfway to my bachelor’s degree before the year is over.”
—Cpl. Vincent Saldaña, MALS-13



“I want to maintain a 300 PFT and figure out what I want to do when I grow up (after my retirement).”
—Lt. Col Robert Skankey, H&HS



Chapel Call

RESOLUTIONS

Lt. Shawn Osborne
Station Protestant Chaplain

I went to the gym this morning for a cardio workout. Normally, I box in my garage and run outside. However, I am a thoroughly acclimated Yuman now, so anything below 50 degrees is cold. A nice, warm gym sounded good, so off I went. I couldn’t believe the number of people exercising!

While it’s great to see people getting in shape, the odds are against them keeping their New Year’s resolution to lose weight. I hope I’m

wrong and I challenge any reader to keep up the good work. I did some research and discovered that only 45 percent of Americans make a resolution, which is down from 88 percent about ten years ago. Of the 45 percent who vow to keep a resolution, only 8 percent of Americans say they always achieve their goal. The decline in resolutions has to do with the reality that a person will probably not keep it up, so why bother?

My personal opinion is that people set unrealistic goals for themselves and quit as soon as they have one slip. Their standard is so high and the lifestyle change is so great that they make promises to themselves they can’t possibly keep. When they fail, they just chalk it up as yet another failure, further depleting their tank of self-worth.

All of this might sound like bad news, but it gets worse: God has set a standard of perfection for everyone. Jesus says in Matthew 5:48, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Everyone has heard the expression, “nobody’s perfect,” and that’s

true. However, that does not change the fact that God is not going to lower His standard simply because you and I can’t meet it. The good news is that God already knows we’re not capable of keeping His standard. So he sent his son Jesus Christ to be the one perfect and sinless person who could keep his standard perfectly in thought, word, and deed.

A number of years back, an author wrote a book called, “I’m OK, You’re OK.” The truth is that I’m not OK, you’re not OK, but Jesus says “that’s OK” and we are to put our trust in him so that we can be made righteous in the eyes of God. The truth is, we’re all going to continue to make mistakes, but we need to have the courage to admit them, confess them to God and put our trust in Jesus Christ. Romans 10:9 says, “That if you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

You can do that today.

DESERT WARRIOR

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Navy trimming ranks, offering early outs

Lisa Novak
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Sailors looking to leave the Navy early may get their wish. In several recent messages to the fleet, the Navy announced its latest force-shaping tools in the form of three early-out programs aimed at officers and enlisted members.

The Enlisted Early Transition Program enables some sailors to leave the Navy a year early. Those who decide to opt out must request a separation date no later than Sept. 15, 2010.

There are certain restrictions. The program isn't open to those in the nuclear field or the special-warfare communities.

Those with permanent change of station orders are also ineligible.

The Navy also announced time-in-grade waivers for senior enlisted sailors in ranks E-7 through E-9, and officers in grades O-5 and O-6. Those individuals with 20 years of service can apply for a waiver that would enable them to retire with only one year in their current rank for enlisted, and two years in their current rank for officers.

“We’ve had excellent retention and good attrition, so that has given us the luxury of having too many people,” said Sharon Anderson, spokeswoman for the

chief of naval personnel. “But we have end-strength goals we have to meet. These voluntary programs are one of the first steps in making sure we can meet that.” Last month the Navy announced it was working toward an overall end-strength of approximately 326,000 by the end of 2011, down from about 332,000 at the end of fiscal 2008.

These programs aren’t designed to create a mass exodus of personnel. The senior enlisted time-in-grade waiver is looking for about 150 applicants, and the officer time-in-grade waiver is looking for about 50.

The Enlisted Early Transition Program is looking to let around 150 sailors go early.

“Even though we’re only looking for small numbers to leave, you have to have some program in place to encourage that,” Anderson said.

The early-transition message was good news for one Naples-based sailor thinking about taking the Navy up on its offer.

Seaman Jordan Grainger is 21, works at the base post office and is ready to leave the service.

“Some join the military at a young age and don’t know exactly what they want to do in life,” said Grainger, who is looking to pursue a degree in sociology when he leaves the Navy.

“At the time, when you started and you had no idea what you wanted to do, a five-



Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Jonathan Snyder

The aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt conducts a replenishment at sea with the Military Sealift Command fast combat support ship USNS Supply. Sailors aboard both vessels as well as the rest of the Navy have the opportunity to leave the service early in accordance with several programs recently released to help reduce Navy troop strength.

year commitment sounded good. Halfway through, you realize there’s something else you want to do and you want to get started on it soon. You don’t want to delay.

It’s difficult waiting and waiting when you’re ready to go now.” The Enlisted Early Transition Program is detailed in NAVADMIN 369/08.

The time-in-grade waivers for senior enlisted sailors is detailed in NAVADMIN 370/08 and, for officers, in NAVADMIN 371/08.



Photo by Cpl. Ryan Tomlinson

Scouts with Delta Company, 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, Regimental Combat Team 5, prepare to search an old Iraqi school during a patrol through Um Al Wazz, Iraq, Aug. 2

Daily attacks in Iraq drop nearly 95 percent

John K. Kruzel
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, — The number of daily attacks in Iraq has dropped nearly 95 percent since last year, a U.S. military official said yesterday.

Iraq suffered an average of 180 attacks per day this time last year. But over the past week, the average number was 10, Army Brig. Gen. David G. Perkins, a Multinational Force Iraq spokesman, said.

“This is a dramatic improvement of safety throughout the country,” Perkins told reporters during a wide-ranging news conference in Baghdad yesterday.

He added that the country’s murder rates have dropped below levels that existed before the start of American operations in Iraq. In November, the ratio was 0.9 per 100,000 people.

Perkins said political progress has complemented the reduction in violence, citing the recent passage of two pieces of legislation that will help guide the future security and political relationship between Washington and Baghdad.

A recently concluded status-of-forces agreement stipulates that American combat troops will leave Iraqi cities by the end of June, and will withdraw from Iraq by the end of 2011.

Perkins said the security deal will cause changes to the way the nations plan, coordinate and

execute tasks together. “However, our mission, goals and commitments to the Iraqi people remain unchanged,” he added.

The other bilateral arrangement signed last week by President George W. Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was the Strategic Framework Agreement, which formalizes economic, diplomatic, cultural and security ties between the two nations.

“These agreements signal Iraq’s emergence from United Nations Security Council oversight and a return to Iraq’s rightful place within the international community,” Perkins said.

Providing an update on the changing composition of the multinational force, Perkins said forces from 19 countries have

completed their missions serving “side by side” with Iraqi security counterparts and have departed the country in the past four months.

“These nations have accomplished much for the people of Iraq. They have trained and mentored Iraqis in everything from security techniques to literacy and public health,” he said. “It has been an honor for us to serve with these great coalition partners.”

The nations include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Georgia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Poland, Tonga and Ukraine.

U.S. turns over Green Zone responsibility to Iraqi government

Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — The United States formally transferred the Republican Palace back to the Iraqi government today, a concrete symbol of the continuing improvement in the country.

The transfer came about as the status of forces agreement between the United States and Iraq took effect.

The agreement replaces the United Nations mandate under which the coalition went into Iraq and has conducted operations there since. Under the agreement, Iraqi forces are now in the lead with U.S. forces in a supporting role or in overwatch.

Officials said that American troops are still on duty at some of the checkpoints in Green Zone, but

they are there to train their Iraqi counterparts rather than with operational control.

“When you come up to a checkpoint, the Iraqis will check your identification. They will make the decision if you come in or go out,” said Army Maj. Gen. Dave Perkins, U.S. spokesman in Iraq. As a colonel, Perkins led the 2nd Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division that conducted the Thunder Run in April 2003 that first entered Baghdad.

“We will continue to be there to provide some technical capacity, to provide some mentoring, but you will see less and less American forces and more and more Iraqi forces – and they will have the majority of the responsibility for making those key decisions which determine the security of the capital,” Perkins said.

The American effort has shifted down the river to the embassy. The new embassy – the largest U.S. embassy in the world – is open for business. Officials at the embassy are working with the Iraqis in

detailing how other portions of the SOFA agreement will play out.

Iraqi security forces have made tremendous gains over the past 18 months, officials in Baghdad said. The U.S. surge of five brigades into Iraq announced in January 2006 brought security and stability to the country. Behind this, the Iraqi army and police were able to develop and train. The agreement recognizes this progress and now Iraqi forces have primary responsibility for security in the country.

The agreement also calls for all American combat troops to be out of cities and villages by June. Planning is underway for this move already, U.S. officials in Baghdad said. The agreement says all U.S. troops will be out of Iraq by the end of 2011.

The transfer of responsibility for security of the Green Zone is the most visible outcome of the agreement. The palace on the banks of the Tigris River was the seat of the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein. U.S. servicemembers called the building

the “three-headed palace” because of three huge busts of Saddam that decorated it.

Soon after American soldiers rolled into Baghdad, the palace became the headquarters of the coalition forces in the country. It also served as the U.S. embassy in the country.

While spared any direct attack in the “shock and awe” campaign in March 2003, the building still had no glass in the windows and American soldiers bunked in some of the rooms decorated with pictures of missiles and other portrayals of Saddam’s might.

The palace became the hub of the Coalition Provisional Authority – the coalition group that ruled Iraq before the first government. U.S. Ambassador Paul Bremer transferred sovereignty back to the Iraqis in a ceremony at the palace in June 2004.

The grounds behind the palace was filled with hundreds of trailers that coalition officials lived in as they worked with Iraqi governmental departments.

Flags over Baghdad: Marines raise flag on new U.S. embassy in Iraq

Donna Miles
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — U.S. Marines raised the American flag yesterday during the dedication ceremony for the new U.S. Embassy in Baghdad as Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker declared “a new era” for Iraq and the Iraqi-U.S. relationship.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John D. Negroponte and almost 1,000 invited guests looked on as the embassy’s Marine security detachment raised the red, white and blue over the largest U.S.

Embassy in the world, with the Army’s 4th Infantry Division Band playing the U.S. national anthem.

The compound, set on 104 acres along the banks of the Tigris River in central Baghdad, includes 27 modern office, housing and support buildings in tones that blend with the desert landscape. Officials said the scale of the new complex reflects the importance of the U.S.-Iraqi bilateral relationship.

More than 1,200 U.S. diplomats, servicemembers and government officials and staff from 14 federal agencies will work and live on the compound, embassy officials said. Their tasks and missions run the gamut: supporting local elections, helping to

fight corruption, helping develop Iraq’s energy and transportation sectors, strengthening the rule of law, providing security training and promoting educational and cultural exchange. In addition, 240 servicemembers assigned to Multinational Force Iraq are based at the embassy.

Construction of the compound began in 2005 and was completed in 2008 at a cost of \$592 million, officials said.

Talabani called the new building a sign of how far the U.S.-Iraqi relationship has come.

“This building is not only a compound for the embassy, but a symbol of the deep friendship between the two peoples of Iraq and America,” he said.



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Derren J. Mazza

U.S. Marines raise the American flag during the dedication ceremony for the new U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Jan. 5, 2009. Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker declared a new era for the Iraqi-U.S. relationship.

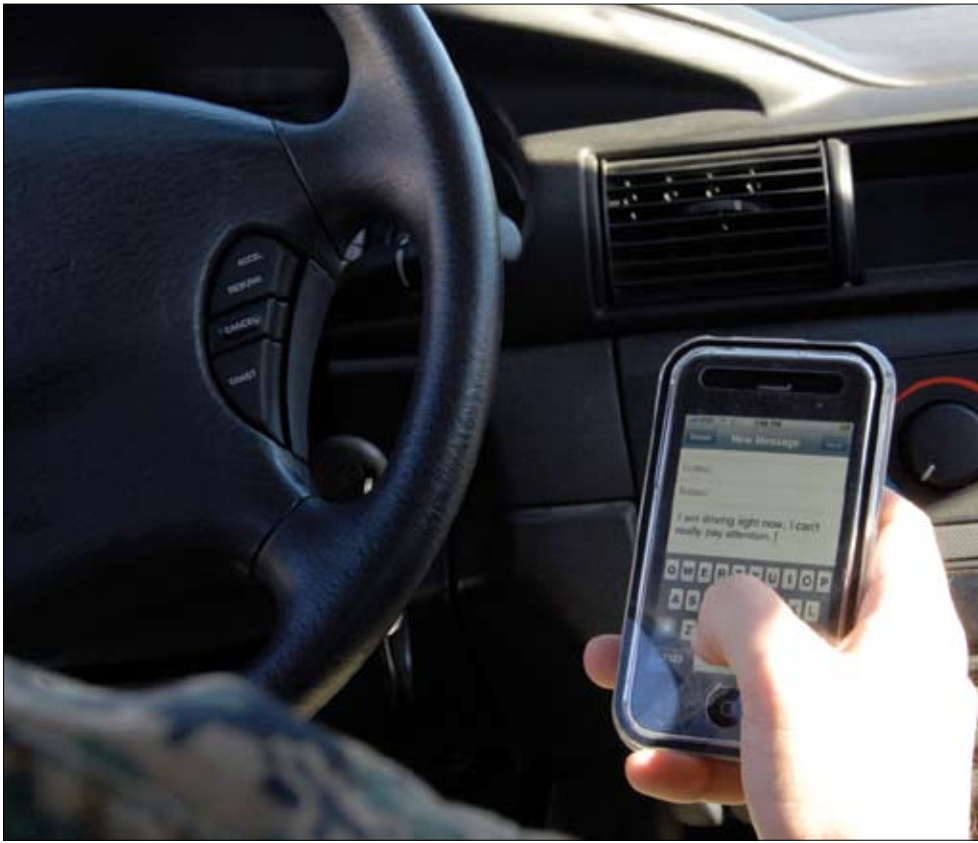


Photo by Lance Cpl. Austin Hazard

Calif. texting ban takes effect

Lance Cpl. Austin Hazard
Desert Warrior Staff

People who text message while driving in California may find themselves receiving a traffic ticket.

A new law, which took effect Jan. 1, bans writing, sending or reading a text message with a cellular phone or other device while driving a motor vehicle.

“Banning electronic text messaging while driving will keep drivers’ hands on the wheel and their eyes on the road, making our roadways a safer place for all Californians,” said Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in a press release.

The law imposes a base fine of \$20 for a first offense and \$50 for each subse-

quent offense, not including court costs and other fees.

The law helps limit driver distractions, which was one of the largest causes of traffic accidents in the state, according to the California Highway Patrol.

“There have been a few times when I’ve seen people driving a little erratically and could see them looking down and texting as I passed them,” said Lt. Col. Robert Skankey, director of safety and standardization here. “It takes a lot of concentration away from driving; it takes your eyes off the road and it takes a hand off the wheel just to type a text message or read one.”

The new law follows California’s previous ban of all cellular phone use except with hands-free devices while driving, which was implemented July 1.

Natasha Lee
Stars and Stripes

As a safeguard against the buckling U.S. economy, the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society recently changed its overseas Spouse Tuition Assistance Program from grant-based assistance to interest-free loans.

Officials said the organization’s education funding — financed through interest accrued from its investment holdings — slid under the current economic downturn.

“We’ve taken a hit,” said Melissa Thurber, Spouse Tuition Assistance Program chairwoman for Okinawa. “So instead of handing out money for grants, we’re being more responsible about the money we can give.”

The change is in place at all overseas Navy-Marine Corps Relief Societies that offer the program, though application dates vary, officials said.

The relief society is a private, non-profit organization that has been providing financial, educational and social assistance to service members and their families for more than 100 years. Funding for its programs comes from donations, financial investments and the society’s Thrift Shop profits.

Under the new program, qualified

active-duty spouses of sailors and Marines living overseas can receive up to \$3,000 in interest-free loans for each year of their studies.

Qualified applicants must be enrolled in a part- or full-time accredited program, including online schooling. Some certification programs also apply, Thurber said.

Loans must be repaid within two years after receipt of the money.

Students now can be eligible to receive larger loans with fewer restrictions, said Andrea Tatayon, director for the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society’s Okinawa and Iwakuni branches.

Previously, society branches awarded need-based grants — no more than \$2,000 a year — to undergraduate and graduate spouses.

Under the grant program, it was harder for applicants to qualify, Tatayon said.

A sufficient savings account or other indicators that an applicant was able to pay for school was usually a red flag that an applicant would be denied, Tatayon said.

Last year, the Okinawa and Iwakuni branches provided more than \$81,000 in program grants to 262 spouses, Tatayon said.

The loan program should help boost qualified applicant numbers, she said.

“It may be a little disappointing to some, but it’s better in the long run

because there is more money, you don’t have to pay back in interest, and we’re able to give more money and assist a wider array of people,” Tatayon said.

Applicants still must submit a budget that includes monthly expenses and a debt-to-spending ratio analysis, as well as participate in an interview to determine eligibility and level of assistance.

Students are eligible to receive a loan as long as their current indebtedness to a relief society doesn’t exceed \$6,000.

Undergraduate recipients must maintain a C average or higher, and graduate students must maintain a B average or higher to maintain their loans, Tatayon said.

Mary Buhler, director at the Sasebo branch, said at least two applicants already have been processed, and employees are lining up appointments for the next couple of weeks.

“We’ve had some mixed feelings about it, but honestly, I feel it’s going to work out better,” she said.

The Okinawa branch will begin accepting applications Jan. 15, Tatayon said. The Iwakuni branch is expected to start accepting applications by the end of February, said staff member Kim Lumpkin.

To find out more about the program and office locations, visit www.nmcers.org.

Missed an issue of the Desert Warrior?

Catch up at

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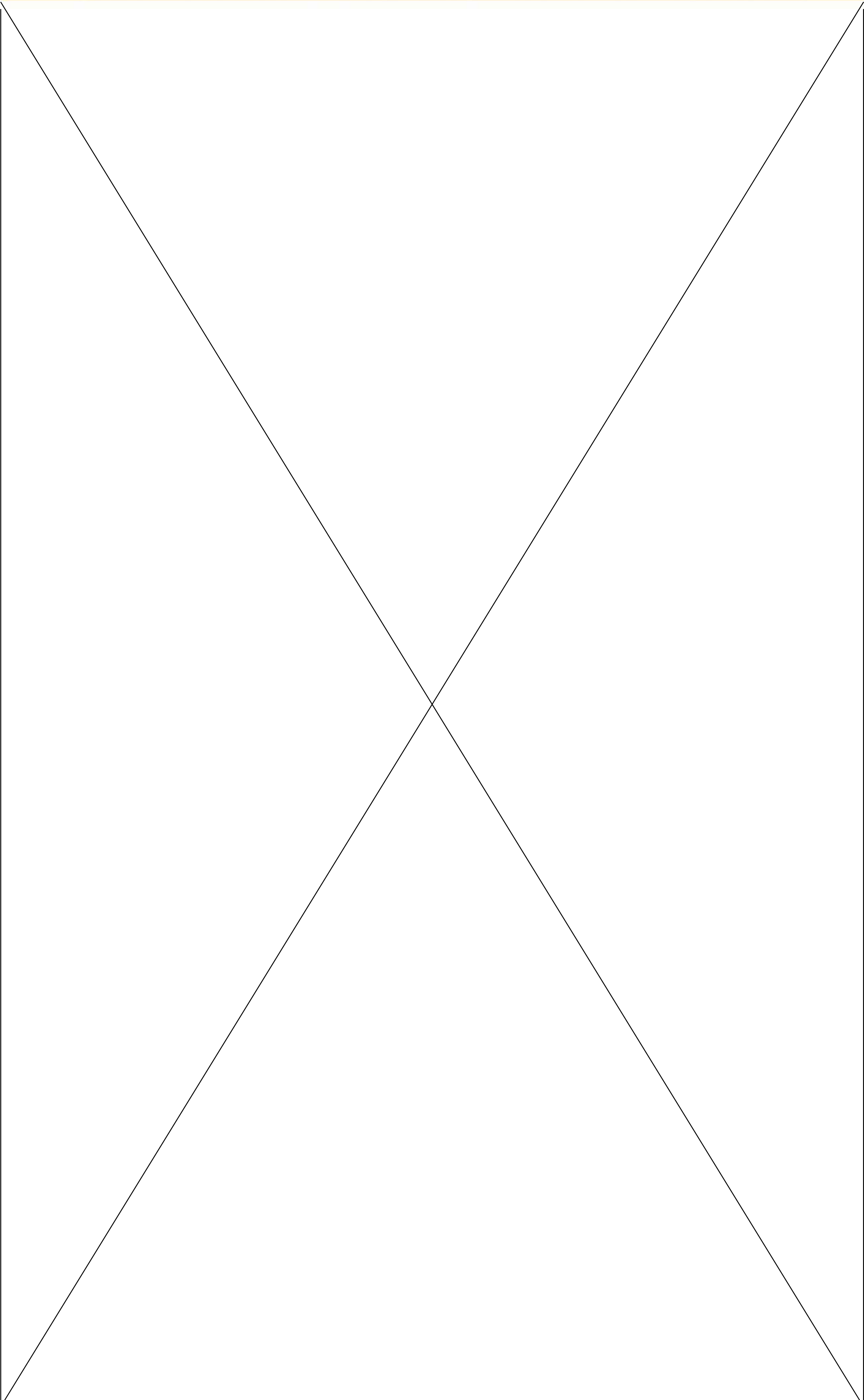
May

June

July

THINK

Always wear a seatbelt.



AT EASE

MFP Change of Command



Photo by Sgt. Brian A. Tuthill

Right, Lt. Gen. John F. Goodman, commander of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific passes the Marine colors to Brig. Gen. Rex C. McMillian, deputy commanding general, MarForPac during a change of command and retirement ceremony on the flightline at Marine Corps Base Hawaii Aug. 22.

News to Use

Free PGA Tour event for all active duty and dependents

The Century Club of San Diego is opening its doors to the PGA TOUR event at Torrey Pines Golf Course Feb. 3-8, free of charge to active duty military and their dependants.

“The Century Club would like to thank the members of our military and their families for their ongoing service and sacrifice,” said Bronson Jacoway, president and general chairman of the Century Club.

“In addition to free admission to the tournament, military personnel and their immediate families will also have free access to the Military Appreciation Pavilion, a private tent at the 14th green. It will have views of the 14th hole, complimentary food and drinks, a special spectator area for outdoor viewing, as well inside television coverage.

“It’s just one small way of showing our gratitude for their commitments,” Jacoway said.

For admission, military members must show their Department of Defense identification cards at the entrance gate.

Last year more than 1,000 military and family members attended the Buick Invitational. The top professional golfers on the PGA TOUR play in the Buick Invitational at Torrey Pines, headed by six-time winner, Tiger Woods.

Disney offers free multi-day passes to service members

• Disneyland Resort in Southern California

Through June 12, each active or retired member of the U.S. military can receive one complimentary three-day “Disney’s Armed Forces Salute” ticket valid for admission to both Disneyland and Disney’s California Adventure parks.

• Walt Disney World Resort in Florida

From January 4 to December 23, 2009, each active or retired member of the U.S. military may obtain one complimentary five-day “Disney’s Armed Forces Salute” ticket with Park Hopper and Water Park Fun & More options. This ticket is valid for five days of admission into the four Walt Disney World theme parks, plus a total of five visits to a choice of a Disney water park, DisneyQuest Indoor Interactive Theme Park or certain other attractions.

In Theaters

Thursday

Quantum of Solace (PG-13)
7 p.m.

Friday

Four Christmases (PG-13)
6 p.m.

Soul Men (R)

9 p.m.

Saturday

Transporter 3 (PG-13)
4 p.m.

Australia (PG-13)

7 p.m.

Sunday

Quantum of Solace (PG-13)
5 p.m.

Monday

Australia (PG-13)
7 p.m.

Tuesday

Four Christmases (PG-13)
7 p.m.

Wednesday

Free admission

Transporter 3 (PG-13)
7 p.m.

MOVIES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE
Call 928-269-2358 or visit
<http://www.yuma.usmc-mccs.org/theater.htm>

MESS HALL MENU

HOURS OF OPERATION

Weekdays

Breakfast: 5:30 - 7:30 a.m.
Lunch: 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Dinner: 4 - 6 p.m.

Saturday & Sunday

Breakfast/Brunch: 9 a.m. to noon
Dinner: 3 - 5 p.m.

Prices

For military without meal cards
Breakfast: \$2.10
Lunch and dinner: \$3.85

THURSDAY

LUNCH: Chicken Noodle Soup
Roast Beef
Turkey w/ Vegetables Primavera
Mashed Potatoes
Brown Gravy
Lyonnise Carrots

DINNER: BBQ Spareribs
Beef Stew
Buttered Egg Noodles
Confetti Rice
Southern-style Greens
Cornbread

FRIDAY

LUNCH: Clam Chowder
Beef Yakisoba
Southern-fried Catfish
Macaroni and Cheese
Simmered Corn
Brussels Sprouts

DINNER: Clam Chowder
Swedish Meatballs
Savory Rotisserie Chicken
Buttered Egg Noodles
Risssole Potatoes
Cauliflower Combo

SATURDAY

BRUNCH: Eggs
Navy Bean Soup
Cold Cereals
Sausage Patties
Oven-fried Bacon
... and more

DINNER: Navy Bean soup
Swiss Steak w/ Gravy
Mexican Turkey Pasta
Roasted Pepper Potatoes
French-fried Cauliflower
Simmered Green Beans

SUNDAY

BRUNCH: Eggs
Grilled Ham Slices
Oven-fried Bacon
Pancakes / Waffles
Chicken Sandwich
... and more

DINNER: Roast Beef
Baked Salmon Filet
Mashed Potatoes
Cilantro Rice
Simmered Carrots
Broccoli Polonaise

MONDAY

LUNCH: Chicken w/ Rice Soup
Salisbury Steak
Chicken & Vegetable Pasta
Mashed Potatoes
Brown Gravy
Green Beans

DINNER: Turkey Pot Pie
Dijon Pork Chop
Roast Potato Wedges
Steamed Rice
Club Spinach
Mixed Vegetables

TUESDAY

LUNCH: Tomato Soup
Roast Beef
Shrimp, Sausage & Penne
Garlic Cheese Potatoes
Broccoli
Succotash

DINNER: Chili Macaroni
Savory Baked Chicken
Grilled Cheese Sandwich
Lyonnise Potatoes
Simmered Peas
Carrots

WEDNESDAY

LUNCH: Corn Chowder
Santa Fe Glazed Chicken
Barbecue Spare Ribs
Long Grain and Wild Rice
Candied Sweet Potatoes
Corn O'Brien

DINNER: Pepper Steak
Cheese Tortellini
Steamed Rice
Italian Vegetable Blend
Calico Cabbage
Cheese Drop Biscuits

Events
www.mccsyuma.org

2nd Annual Military Appreciation Golf Tournament
Yuma Golf and Country Club

Free
for all Active Duty

January 31, 2009

To Sign up: Email Ski at sosinskiw@usmc-mccs.org or call 928-269-2280

ADVERTISEMENT

ADS

SPORTS

Yuma soccer squad shuts out 29 Palms to start regional tournament



Photos by Lance Cpl. Gregory Aalto

A Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms midfielder attempts to evade Kevin Grannum, Yuma midfielder, during the Marine Corps West Coast Regional soccer tournament Tuesday at Ramada Field. Yuma placed 3rd in last year's tournament. The tournament is used to select Marines to tryout for the All-Marine team. Last year two Yuma Marines were selected for the tryout.

Lance Cpl. Gregory Aalto
Desert Warrior Staff

Yuma began the 2009 Marine Corps West Coast Regional soccer tournament by beating Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms 1-0 Tuesday at Ramada Field.

Raymond Castro, who splits his time between goalkeeper and forward, scored the lone goal in the match, which had only five shots on goal from both teams combined.

"I was just at the right place, at the right time," said Castro, who was one of two Yuma Marines who made the tryout for the 2008 All-Marine team.

Castro is playing goaltender in place of Julio Alvarez, Yuma goalkeeper, who was selected for the All-Marine team last year, but is not participating this year because of a deployment.

After Castro spent the first 70 minutes keeping his net safe, Yuma coach Hector Reyes moved Castro to forward.

Reyes said after the game that it was all a part of his plan, to wear down Twentynine Palms and then toward the end bring in goal scorers who were fresh.

"We cut it a little close, but it was a great game. Everyone really pulled together."

Allowing only three shots on goal, day one's most valuable player in Reyes' mind was sweeper Luis Osorio, who leads the Yuma defense.

"I have some of the best defenders in this tournament and they have what it takes to win," said Reyes.

Looking ahead at the rest of the tournament, Reyes said the team needs to stay



Lt. Col. Robert Ford, Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron commanding officer, takes the ceremonial "first kick" at the opening ceremonies of the Marine Corps West Coast Regional soccer tournament Tuesday at Ramada Field. Before scoring a goal against Camp Pendleton's 1st Marine Logistics Group's goaltender, Ford spoke about the parallels of military and sports to the tournaments participants.

tough and maintain urgency in order to win the championship.

In other opening day games, Twentynine Palms beat Marine Corps Base Hawaii 2-1, Last year's champion. Camp Pendleton's 1st Marine Logistics Group beat Marine Corps Recruit Depot 11-0. MCB Camp Pendleton beat Marine Corps Air Station Miramar 4-1. Later Miramar beat MCRD 16-0 and MCB Camp Pendleton beat MCB Hawaii 4-0.

The tournament champion will be determined by the amount of points accrued during pool play, similar to many college football conference champions, said Walter Sosinski, tournament director.

Teams will play each other in the seven-team tournament. Originally a different format was slated to be used, but the plan was altered after Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow backed out of the tournament.

Marine Corps regional soccer tournaments are conducted on both coasts and in Japan to select players to try out for the

All-Marine team.

This is Yuma's second year hosting the tournament and last year was the first time in air station history.

Ramada Field recently received a re-leveling and re-seeding prior to the tournament.

Opening ceremonies for the tournament were conducted Tuesday. After the Kofa High School Choir performed the National Anthem and Marines Hymn, Lt. Col. Robert Ford, Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron commanding officer, spoke to the players on Ramada Field about the parallel between military and sport.

After his speech, Ford took the inaugural "first kick" against 1st MLGs goaltender.

Although 1st MLGs goaltender guessed correctly on Ford's shot direction, the "rocket shot" hit the goaltender and kept dribbling right into the net for a score.

The tournament ends Friday with games at 9 a.m., 11 a.m., 1 p.m., 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.